577 an uncomfortable situation among his own family; but under-
626 neath this surface, the evil shows through. It is not unusual to
577 be faced with a disconcerting absence of moral sense, ferocious
157 egotism, deep-seated duplicity, impudent treachery and cold, unperturbed cruelty (1 ). And one can see, perhaps in all of

1. The chronicle of Ségou, especially, attests this tradition of trickery and hypocrisy (see especially the tales about Ma-n-son, p. 93, and about Da, p. 101).

them, the scorn and even hatred felt for anyone who is unfortunate, weak, ill or abandoned. However, it should certainly be noted that there are also Bambara who display the most disinterested devotion, generous hospitality and remarkable courage; some even give evidence of that kind of inborn distinction which is to be found among even the most primitive peoples and which is the mark of superior people.

183 Thus, no code organizes Bambara rules of life. Everything depends upon custom, that mysterious thread, at once fragile and strong, which links the generations one with another [130] and which sustains the individual, though he is unaware of it, to such an extent that he is completely lost without it. Handed down by earlier generations, superstitiously preserved, it is imposed through fear of the punishment which will follow transgression. At first glance, custom appears to be an amalgam of the most heterogeneous elements and that is why we Europeans find it at once respectable and ridiculous, good and bad, useful and futile, sometimes atrocious and then again excellent. On closer study it is seen to exhibit, on the basis of feelings common to all humanity, an efflorescence peculiar to the native milieu, a natural morality which duplicates positive laws.

It is the nature of man to observe certain laws, to see the good and the bad in what surrounds him and, in his conduct, to display a leaning toward the good and an aversion to the bad. He recognizes within himself something which criticizes his actions from a similar point of view and, which, in fact, judges them.

183
181 The Bambara has a very highly developed sense of this idea of justice and there is nothing he resents more than injustice or a denial of justice. His resentment is stubborn and his vengeance, which may be deferred under a show of indifference, is implacable. The chronicle of Ségou is rich in pertinent examples. There was Ngolo Dyara, bringing murder and disaster on his own relatives in order to satisfy his hatred for having been sold into slavery by his uncle and not ransomed by any of his relatives. There was Kégné Mari who, watching the murder of Touro-koro in the Komo wood, expressed his vengeance finally fulfilled by saying: "Remember how, falsely accusing me of adultery with one of your wives, you had me lashed? And how on that day I told you that even though I were lying on the ground, if I could touch you with my foot, I would lay you low? Here at last is the day of my vengeance!" Similar examples are innumerable.

If he is powerless against injustice, the Bambara will wait patiently and, each time he has to speak, will dissimulate his weakness in formulas which have a double meaning, such as
[195] O do!, meaning "That's it!" O nya-na, meaning "Oh well!" Tigi!, meaning "That's true"; and other similar expressions. At the same time, he is repeating to himself his proverb: don' m'i fantan', a bla k'a teme, meaning "Don't pay attention while you are weak," that is, "Wait until I am strong enough to take vengeance (lit., to pay you back)."

181 This instinctive feeling for justice accounts, in a certain
571 measure, for the family bonds made up of reciprocal rights [131]
626 and duties between parents and between them and their children and, by an analogy of which we shall see other examples, between master and slave and between chief and subject. The obligation to respect all pacts concluded in the form of vows, oaths or fraternal alliance rests on the same basis. And it is the same notion that inspires the repression of acts which are almost universally condemned: perjury, treason, false witness, slander,
[691] theft and murder. It sustains the tireless persistence of the pleader who will go through endless lawsuits to obtain redress for a wrong done to him or to one of his people. And it gives strength to public vengeance against the sorcerer.

183 However, there is superimposed upon this natural law its application, the so-called positive law. How very odd is the aspect of this natural law beneath its external surface! For there are as many ways of envisaging the application of natural law as there are legislators, and among the Bambara, in many respects everyone is his own legislator since each has his own custom. All these [individual] customs which jostle, cross, interpenetrate and superpose each other, constitute for the European a compact mass which he calls "custom," whose thousand facets are changeable, elusive, diverse and unstable. However, under these disparate exteriors emerge general traits which are, so to speak, the framework of custom, and this will be shown in the following study of institutions.

183 784 Among the laws which the Bambara imposes on himself or on his fellows, the most widespread and, in any event, the ones most noticed by Europeans, are the taboos (tne). The Bambara forbids himself, his relatives and his congeners to do or to say certain things; and the domain of these prohibitions has, theoretically, no limits. A hasty and therefore superficial and incomplete study of what may be called "the honorable name" (dyamu) has given rise to research by ethnographers on these taboos as they affect the limited area of the dyamu; they have chosen to study taboos especially in this connection.

In actual fact, however, the taboo (tne) penetrates the entire native milieu and is really its law. The purpose is to prevent any contact whatsoever with the invisible [132] on the theory that, should such contact take place, it would inevitably unleash severe punishment upon its author unless the latter had the time and the means to purify himself at once through ritual procedures. As a result, the only person who can state what a taboo is, is one who has knowledge of the invisible and can discern its presence when the ordinary person is aware of nothing. Knowledge is the prerogative of the old (koro) and of the master (fa), who represent the ancestors and are the guardians of custom. It is also the secret of a small number of "seers," whose natural methods are ordinarily reinforced by innumerable processes of mantic.

183 784 Thus used, taboo has organized and transformed the native milieu; it has established a line of demarcation between the sacred and the profane by removing from ordinary intercourse persons, places and objects connected with the invisible and considered to be impregnated by it. However, since by its very nature it forms an incontestable and nonappealable law, it has been the favorite means of anyone in authority wishing to impose his will without fear of protest. Thus the laity has, so to speak, had to submit to a arbitrary system of law that is essentially religious. Social regulations, rules of hygiene, medical prescriptions, culinary preparations, forms of courtesy -- all these are surrounded with taboos and all have absorbed from the tne the very essence of its vitality and its constraining force.

784 593 Within the family, which is the generating force of any collective group, the individual finds himself surrounded by taboos throughout his life. They are what establish and maintain the authority of the elders (koro-u) and especially of their head (fa). Taboos impose ancestral traditions which have developed separately and become gradually superimposition from earliest times to the present, the whole of which constitute, in fact, family custom.

784 [571] Patriarchy, brotherhood, the state, and all Bambara collectivities operate in the same way, since all collectivities are in a sense modeled on the natural family.

Religion, family, and society as a whole, in short the whole of Bambara civilization, have been and continue to be largely dependent on the tne.

[133] 3. Mantic, Religion and Magic

787 Mantic. Among the Bambara, as among all the Sudanese, religion and magic are both based on a belief in a permanent revelation which the manes, the spirits and the gods give to men with regard to the events of their lives.

The various means by which man can come to know this revelation on the part of invisible beings are what is called divination or mantic. This is extra-rational knowledge since it makes known things which could not be learned through reason